

MISSING PLANE/
JAPAN

RATHER: Good evening. This is the CBS Evening News, Dan Rather reporting. The Soviet Union was unrepentant today. For the first time since a Soviet warplane shot down that Korean airliner a week ago, a member of the Kremlin's ruling Politburo publicly discussed the attack.

RATHER: Some of the evidence the United States has gathered about the attack reveals more about the Soviet Union than just the actions of a single warplane. David Martin at the Pentagon explains how.

MARTIN: U.S. intelligence sources say a reconstruction of the final hours of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 shows a Soviet air defense network caught badly off guard. For the Soviet interceptors, it was not a question of whether they should shoot the plane down, but if they could before it got away. According to intelligence sources, when the Korean airliner flew over the extremely important Kamchatka peninsula no Soviet interceptors even made visual contact with it before it exited Soviet airspace over the Sea of Okhotsk. They didn't even get close, one source said. All the Soviet defenders on Kamchatka could do was alert Sakhalin Island that an unidentified aircraft was coming. Interceptors from Sakhalin rushed out to meet it, and the recordings of pilots talking to their ground controllers show there is not much time to act. The ground controller apparently tells the pilot of the SU-15 to increase speed by using his after-burner. But the pilot says, 'I have enough speed. I don't need to turn on my after-burner.' He reports his missiles are locked on and he is closing in on his target. 'Have I enough time?', he asks the ground. A minute later he mutters, 'Fiddlesticks.' Something has delayed his firing. Perhaps the ground controller told him to make one last attempt at visual identification. The pilot switches his weapons off and closes further. At the same time, the 747 climbs from 33 to 35,000 feet. As it climbs, its airspeed slows and the Soviet pilot suddenly finds himself in front of his target. 'It should have been earlier,' he tells the ground controller, apparently complaining that he should've fired the first chance he had. Now he has to get himself behind the target again. By the time the Russian actually fires, U.S. sources say, the 747 is either just about to leave or already out of Soviet airspace. One source said the Korean airliner was hit in the left wing and made a looping dive to the left, bringing it back inside Soviet territorial waters when it crashed. If the Soviets performed so poorly against an easy target like a high-flying 747, what does that say about their ability to intercept a bomber flying low and using its electronics to confuse their radar? The answer may be that the Soviet military is just as incompetent as it is brutal. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT
7 September 1983

MISSING PLANE/ JENNINGS: There has been another indication of Soviet sensitivity over its airspace over Sakhalin Island. U.S. intelligence officers report that yesterday the Soviets almost shot down one of their own. ABC's John McWethy reports that a Soviet plane was traveling through the same region as Korean Airlines Flight 007. Soviet fighter jets scrambled, armed their missiles, and only on visual contact found it was a Soviet transporter.